

# CHRISTIANITY TODAY



||| A PRESBYTERIAN JOURNAL DEVOTED TO STATING, DEFENDING  
AND FURTHERING THE GOSPEL IN THE MODERN WORLD |||

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## The Cosmic Significance of Christ

IN a previous issue (September, 1930), under the title "CHRIST and Christianity," we pointed out the place that CHRIST occupies in the religion that He founded—a place so central that CHRIST Himself is Christianity to such an extent that apart from Him there is and can be no such thing as Christianity in any proper sense of the word.

It is evident, however, that we cannot see in CHRIST a proper object of religious worship—in harmony with the New Testament and the great historic creeds—without seeing in Him one who sustains relations to the universe as a whole as well as to mankind. If we saw in JESUS simply the first Christian—so that to be a Christian is to believe *like* JESUS rather than *in* or *on* JESUS—there would be no occasion for our thinking of Him in cosmical terms. It is otherwise, however, when we see in Him an object of worship. Unless JESUS occupies a position in the universe as a whole that warrants our calling him God, we can worship Him only at the cost of rendering to a creature what belongs only to the Creator. This means that what we regard as the Christian attitude toward JESUS is rooted in the conviction that He not only occupies the central place in Christianity but a central place in the universe as a whole.

What has just been said might seem to imply that the place that CHRIST occupies in the universe as a whole is a truth we infer from what the Scriptures teach rather than a truth explicitly taught in the Scriptures. No such implication is intended. It is true, of course, that most frequent mention is made of the relations

that He sustains to men as teacher, friend, example, saviour, master, and such like, but at the same time they clearly teach that He occupies a position in the universe as a whole that is nothing short of central. JOHN and PAUL spoke not only for themselves but for all the writers of the New Testament when with JESUS in mind they wrote: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with GOD, and the Word was GOD. All things were made through Him and without Him was not anything made that was made" (John I: 1-3); "Who is the image of the invisible GOD, the first born of all creation; for in Him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through Him and unto Him; and He is before all things, and in Him

all things consist" (Colossians I:15-17).

It is not enough, then, that we think of CHRIST as the Saviour of the world and as the LORD and Life of humanity. We gladly admit that those who see in Him their Saviour as well as their LORD and King have laid hold on that which is most vital for them; and yet it is by no means a matter of indifference whether men see in Him at the same time—as did JOHN and PAUL—the creator, sustainer, and goal of the universe as a whole.

There are various considerations that indicate the importance of our keeping in mind the place that JESUS CHRIST occupies in the universe as a whole. The following may be mentioned:

1. Unless we see in JESUS one whose rank in the scale of being places Him by the side of GOD, and so one whose place in the universe is such a place as GOD occupies, we cannot believe in the incarnation as taught in the New Testament; because the thought most essential to such an incarnation is the thought that GOD himself in the person of His Son assumed the flesh of our humanity, and "so was and continueth to be GOD and man, in two distinct natures, and one person, forever."

2. Back of the conviction that JESUS is Saviour of men and their rightful LORD and King, in the New Testament meaning of these terms, lies, expressed or unexpressed, the thought of the relations He sustains to the universe as a whole. Deny these wider relations and only those who fail to think their convictions through would be able to see in Him their Saviour and LORD—for time and eternity. Only one who sustains such relations to the

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universe as a whole, as according to the New Testament JESUS sustains, could be our Saviour and LORD in the full rich sense in which He is set forth as such in the New Testament.

3. The place that JESUS occupies in the universe is the presupposition of Christianity's claim to be the final religion. Unless we see in JESUS one whose position in the universe makes Him a proper object of religious worship, it is readily conceivable that as MOSES and the prophets have been surpassed, so JESUS will be surpassed; and hence that Christianity is only possessed of a temporary significance. Such a notion, however, is inconceivable if He be really a proper object of worship; for in that case the universe contains nothing higher than He, so that the religion that centers in Him is necessarily the final and absolute religion. This thought is common to the writers of the New Testament. It is in the Epistle to the Hebrews, however, that it finds fullest expression. Its author argues that Christianity is the final religion because of the superiority of JESUS not only to all who had preceded Him but to all who might come after Him. If JESUS were but a creature it were conceivable that the religion He established should be superseded by another and more perfect religion; but since He is "the effulgence of God's glory and the very image of His substance, the one also who made the worlds and who upholds all things by the word of His power" we may be sure that such a supposition will never become a reality.

4. Unless we keep in mind the cosmic significance of JESUS it is almost certain that we will misconceive the relation between nature and grace, science and faith, ordinary knowledge and revealed knowledge. To realize that CHRIST is creator and sustainer and goal of the universe as well as the saviour of mankind is to realize that these things have a common source, and, hence, that they are related organically rather than mechanically. This means that grace has not been added to nature or revealed knowledge to ordinary knowledge as house is added to house in the building of a city; rather that grace has been added to nature and revealed knowledge to ordinary knowledge as the scion from the good olive tree is added to the wild olive tree into which

it is grafted. Nature and grace, ordinary knowledge and revealed knowledge, are not to be conceived as independent still less as antagonistic entities. They are related vitally and organically; and that because JESUS is the source and head both of the kingdom of nature and the kingdom of grace. It follows that there can be no real contradiction between science and faith, i. e., between what may be learned from the study of nature and what may be learned from the Scriptures. There may, of course, be a real contradiction between certain interpretations of nature and certain interpretations of the Scriptures; but in view of the fact that JESUS is ultimately the author of both, it is obvious that when both are rightly interpreted there can be no real contradiction between them. Those who are aware that JESUS is Creator as well as Saviour will not be in constant fear lest discoveries in science will disprove the contents of Christian faith. They may be fearful lest men through wrong interpretations of nature be led to reject the Christian faith, or *vice versa*, but they are certain that ultimately it will be clear to all that there is no real contradiction between true science and true faith. Doubtless there is a contradiction, for instance, between Naturalism in all its forms and Christian faith, but that finds its explanation in the fact that Naturalism is grounded in a wrong or at least inadequate interpretation of nature, not in the fact that there is a contradiction between nature rightly interpreted and the teachings of CHRIST and His apostles.

5. A perception of the place that JESUS occupies in the universe as a whole promotes a right attitude toward this world and its activities. If we think of Jesus exclusively as related to mankind the tendency will be strong within us to suppose that He came into the world to save sinners out of the world and that He is indifferent to the fate of the world itself. In that case it is more or less inevitable that we will underestimate the earthly spheres of art and science, literature and politics, domestic and social economy, and that we will sympathize with those who say that "to be converted and then go forth to convert others" is practically the whole of Christian duty. It is indeed

better that we neglect this world and its activities than that we neglect JESUS and His gospel. If we had to choose between being mere secularists, mere worldlings, and being monks and nuns, it would be the part of wisdom to take our stand with the latter. "For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." But we are under no necessity of making such a choice. This world is not evil in itself. JESUS Himself created it. Moreover, His prayer for His disciples was not that they be taken out of the world but that they be kept from the evil in the world. Still further the object of CHRIST's saving work was not simply individual sinners, it was humanity itself together with the world humanity inhabits. He came to save the world itself and His task will not have been fully done until "the creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption." With all its sin, "the earth is the LORD's and the fulness thereof." Hence our watchword as Christians should not be separation from the world but only from what is evil in the world. We are indeed pilgrims in this world, but pilgrims with many tasks to perform ere we leave it. Moreover we should remember that this world belongs to our LORD and Saviour and that it is our privilege to enjoy its blessings with thanksgiving. "For all things are yours; whether PAUL, or APOLLOS, or CEPHAS, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are CHRIST's and CHRIST is God's."

6. Finally, it is important that we think of JESUS in cosmical terms that we may be assured that our confidence in Him is not misplaced. If He were some lesser person it is conceivable that His words should fail of realization; but being what He is we may be altogether sure that He will fulfill His promises and that it will happen to us as individuals and as a race even as He said. It was because PAUL thought of JESUS in cosmical terms that he lived his life in the persuasion that nothing could separate him from the love of GOD, which is in CHRIST JESUS, and that at its close enabled him to say "I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."